The Global Voice of Pilots

IFALPA

SAFETY BULLETIN

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Operations at Nice (NCE/LFMN) Airport

BACKGROUND

Situated in the South of France, Nice airport is recognised as one of the most challenging airports for pilots. Several natural characteristics associated with strong air traffic constraints require additional preparation before flying there for the first time. The following recommendations should be considered.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Although not mandatory, simulator training is strongly recommended before flying into NCE. In the absence of such training, extensive familiarization with surrounding environment is essential. Official documentation is available here:
- https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/Nice_en.pdf
- Extreme vigilance is necessary when flying the visual approach to runways 22L/R, because of high CFIT risk, particularly at night.
- Extra holding fuel is strongly recommended, especially under westerly wind conditions, since the airport may be closed if the weather minimums are not met.
- NCE should not be considered as an alternate unless the crew has had previous experience of this airport and its operational restrictions.

ENVIRONMENT

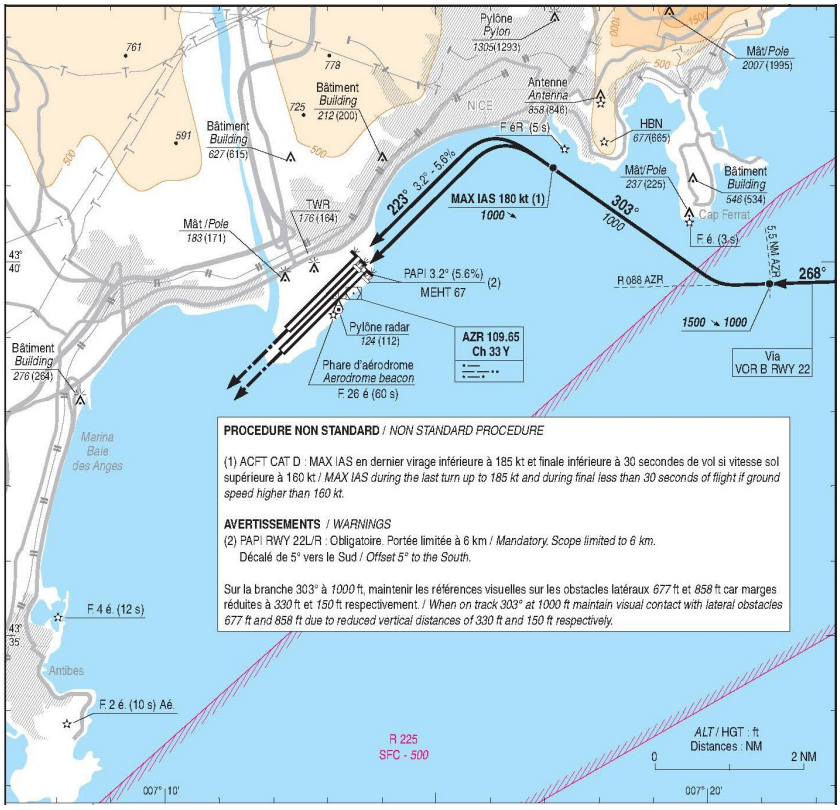
Situated at the tip of the French Alps, the airport is surrounded by high terrain to the North, and the Mediterranean Sea to the south. This leads to:

- Terrain-induced turbulence in strong wind conditions. In strong westerly winds conditions, marked downdraught can be expected over the thresholds of runways 22L/R.
- Even in calm wind conditions, the Var River valley situated just West of the airport can produce unexpected windshear on final approach to runways 04L/R.
- Sea haze can be expected with S/SE winds.
- Sea breeze can produce significant changes in wind direction at low level. Strong tail wind is sometimes observed at both ends of the runways, leading to temporary closure of the airport.
- At night, "black hole" effect over the sea can lead to spatial disorientation. Additionally, the proximity of the city can make runways difficult to distinguish against background lighting.
- Bird hazard is present all year-round, especially during spring and autumn.
- Proximity of Cannes airport and Monaco generates heavy VFR and helicopter traffic in and around Nice. TCAS resolutions can be expected.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL (ATC)

- Tailwind beyond the 5kt ICAO recommendation is regularly used by ATC to avoid numerous configuration changes and give priority to runways 04L/R.
- Notification of configuration changes on ATIS is often delayed, which may lead to pilots having briefed the wrong arrival/departure.
- Inverted use of runways pair (runway crossing is performed before take-off instead of after landing) creates numerous runway incursion hotspots
- There are no stop bars installed
- The high number of published arrival procedures – see below – makes it difficult to properly brief the approach, especially for pilots unfamiliar with the airport.
- Because of heavy traffic, ATC often maintain arriving aircraft at high altitude, requiring high profile descent afterwards.

PROCEDURES RUNWAYS 22



- Mandatory visual approach (due to terrain). RNP procedures consist of non-precision RNP approaches followed by a visual segment starting 4,5 NM from the runways, with an 80 degree turn at low altitude over water.
- For aircraft without RNP capabilities, the VOR procedures consist of non-precision VOR approaches followed by a visual segment starting 5 NM from the runways, including two turns at low altitude over water.
- There are no approach lights due to deep water and heavy maritime traffic.
- The PAPI is unusually set at 3,2° due to close terrain.
- Go-around procedures are complex (low altitude level-off with rapid turn towards the sea).

PROCEDURES RUNWAYS 04

- Although an ILS is available, RNP and VOR- DME indirect approaches with a visual 45 degree turn on final are usually preferred for noise abatement reasons.
- There are no approach lights due to deep water and heavy maritime traffic
- Departure/missed approach: very early turn towards the sea is required due to close terrain.
- Flying a direct approach (ILS or RNP) when the indirect approach is in service will trigger an investigation which may result in an infringement report, and lead the ACNUSA (Airport Noise Nuisance Control Authority) to issue a penalty up to 40.000 Euros (www.acnusa.fr – French only).